

## Beautiful Creatures (On Hiatus) by Mouthbreather (scalding\_coolness)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Additional Warnings Apply, Angst and Humor, Anxiety, Apartments, Badass, Claustrophobia, F/F, F/M, Fierce, Fluff, Gen, Health Issues, Homophobia, Homophobic Language, Hurt/Comfort, Jane Hopper - Freeform, M/M, Mainly Elmax and Byler, Max Is Awkward, Modern AU, Paranoia, Post-Canon, Precious El, Strong Female Characters, Strong Language, Warnings May Change, and whipped, slowburn

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Aunt Becky, Barbara "Barb" Holland, Billy Hargrove, Demogorgon (Stranger Things), Dustin Henderson, Eleven/Max Centric, Holly Wheeler, I love you all - Character, Jane El Hopper, Jim Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Martin Brenner, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mentioned., Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove, Ted Wheeler, Terry Ives, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove & Steve Harrington, Dustin Henderson/Lucas Sinclair, Eleven/Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

She liked to think of Jane as thunder. *Loud, overwhelming and powerful*, but that also meant calling Jane a storm. Max never even knew she was caught up in the devastating beauty of one until it ended.

And storms always left disaster in their wake, no matter how

breathhtaking they could be.

*or*

Max learning why storms were named after people and Jane being that lesson with her own reasons.

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*Aged up characters, as in post-college. Elmax endgame.*

*Summary changed recently.*

# **1. the swooning of two hearts**

## **Author's Note:**

I'm so excited to see your response to this!!

## **Summary for the Chapter:**

It was then she realised what she was really dealing with. An approximately nineteen inches space with the only doors --escape closed and the power out.

Shit.

She entered the flat's lift with shuffling feet, letting loose the buttons of her blazer and turning around to press the button for the fourth floor when a pair of rushing footsteps caught her attention and she held the door.

The girl looked at her with grateful smile before taking a deep breath and entering the lift.

"Uh, which floor?" She asked when the brunette did not tell.

The girl looked at her with mild confusion before realisation sparked through her eyes.

"Oh, sorry. Third." She replied concisely.

Max nodded as she pressed the buttons and the doors closed not a second later.

She toyed with the sleeve of her blazer, glancing at the girl beside her curiously. The face wasn't familiar and Max wondered whether the girl lived just a floor below hers. Why hadn't she ever seen her before?

She sneakily glanced at the curly haired girl once more. Her tuft of brown hair looked soft contrasting starkly against her pale skin. Perfectly curved eyebrows and plump, pink lips, not too full and not

too thin. Max couldn't see the girl's eyes, but already knew they had to be pretty.

She was beautiful.

She looked away when the girl shuffled, hoping she hadn't been caught gawking so shamelessly, but the thought left her mind completely when the lift jerked to an abrupt stop and the sole lightbulb atop their heads went out simultaneously.

She cursed under her breath as she thought of the comfort of her bed and how she wasn't going to get that anytime soon. Work had been grueling and as if the bad weather outside hadn't been enough, this was the last thing she needed.

She heard a short audible intake of breath from beside her and glanced at the girl, trying to get a better look at her face in the darkness. The brunette was pulling at her collar as she shuffled uneasily.

Max looked away when their eyes almost met. They spent a minute or so in a dead beat silence before she stepped forward, pressing at the emergency button impatiently.

No response came.

"No, why is the power out?" She almost groaned.

"What?" The brunette asked softly.

"The power's out." She replied frustratingly.

"So we're stuck?" The girl's voice wavered.

"More or less." She sighed out as she leaned over the cold aluminium deflatedly.

Max heard clothes rustle a moment later and looked beside her to see the curly haired girl fumbling out of her jacket before breathing in through her mouth audibly the second time in the past minute.

Even in the partial darkness she could see a sheen of sweat lining the

girl's pale forehead.

"Are you okay?" She frowned.

It was November. The air was biting cold, colder because of the rain and even in the closed lift, the atmosphere was nowhere near hot enough to make one sweat.

"Y-yes." The terse, but stuttering reply came.

She didn't really believe the answer and instead opted to drive the girl's attention away from their situation. She was clearly nervous. Max had been too when she'd gotten stuck in one the first time.

"The name's Max." She outstretched her hand, grimacing after.

She had never been a good conversationalist.

"E- Jane." The brunette replied, her eyes eyeing Max's extended arm before her own rose a moment later.

Max noticed how clammy and cold her palm was as she shook Max's hand before withdrawing and continuing fumbling with the collar of her T-shirt once more.

"It happens often, you know? It's nothing new." She tried to comfort the other girl before realising what she'd just said wasn't all that comforting.

"Yeah?" The girl asked before darting forward and pressing at the buttons with barely concealed desperation.

"Hey." Max called out. "It'll come back on. Relax."

The only reply she got was a gasp before Jane coughed, scratching her neck.

It was then she realised what she was really dealing with. An approximately nineteen inches space with the only doors --escape closed and the power out.

*Shit.*

She was glad in that moment for the tiny cubicle she'd been given by her snobby boss. Her workspace was small enough to make someone with claustrophobia run for the hills and she'd gotten stuck in the office lift more times than she could count. She was used to small spaces unlike the girl beside her gasping for air.

Max shook her head violently at that. *Focus, Mayfield*

"Hey, hey. It's okay." She lurched forward awkwardly with her hands raised halfway.

She didn't know what to do.

Her words fell on deaf ears and Max's heart leaped in her chest when she saw the panic stricken look across the girl's face. "I.."

"C-can't. I." She said in between gasps before her words died on her tongue.

"Okay- lo- fuck." She stilled, her hands suddenly jittery.

She really didn't know what to do.

Jane continued breathing harshly and her arm shot out to grasp onto something, anything before her knees buckled. Max darted forward and brought her arms around the brunette just in time before Jane fell to the ground. She lowered both of them to the floor gingerly.

"Jane." She called out, tucking the girl's discarded jacket under her head as she laid her down in the small space.

A wheeze was all she got in an answer.

The sound reminded her of an old fuzzy memory. Of when she was somewhere around thirteen.

Will Byers tucked into the coon of Mike's neck as the taller boy murmured sweet nothings into his ears. "Just breathe. Can you hear me? In and out, Will. That's it. Breathe with me, I'm right here."

She had stood beside the two fumbling, not knowing how to help, just like how she didn't right now.

"Son of bitch, come on." She stood up and kicked at the lift's door, pounding at the buttons with shaky fingers and then at the door. There had to be someone nearby.

Another cough sounded from behind her and Max stopped throwing a fit.

It wasn't working. Nothing was working.

She kicked the door one last time angrily before she slid down beside Jane. She cursed when she saw the girl's eyes were shut tight and cringed at the painful sounding wheeze that left her lips.

*Oh, lord.*

She darted her hand forward and pushed away the girl's sweat drenched hair from her face.

"I need you to breathe. Please," She said pleadingly as she licked her lips.

Nothing.

"Jane, sweetheart." She put both her hands over the brunette's defined cheekbones. "It's okay. I-m right here. Do you feel me?" She caressed the girl's cheek. It was cold and wet. With tears or sweat, she couldn't tell. "Breathe. Slowly. Listen to me, I-listen to my voice, nothing is wrong."

Jane coughed and Max didn't know whether what she was doing was working or not, but she carried on anyway.

"We're going to get out of here, okay? *I am* going to get you out of here, but I need you to breathe." She paused shakily.

"J-just. Breathe with me. In and out, Jane," She said resolutely.

Max didn't know if it was her mind playing games on her, but Jane's breath almost followed hers shakily and she readjusted. She was getting somewhere.

"Inhale and hold it." She instructed softly.

Jane's breathing paused for only a second before she gasped through her mouth.

"Okay, that's. That's fine. You're doing good." She comforted, caressing the girl's cheek tenderly once more.

When had she learned to be *that* soft and *nice*?

The lift suddenly jerked roughly and the light came back on and Max's heart skipped a beat.

*About time.*

"Jane, look. The doors are going to op--." She started, but the light flickered before going out once more and the lift thudded to a stop violently.

"For fuck's sake!" She shouted as tears of frustration stung her eyes.

She realised a minute later she had fisted her hands in curly brown hair and let go immediately.

"Shit. Shit, I'm sorry." She got on her knees, ignoring the ache in her feet.

"Okay, okay." She muttered to herself anxiously, rubbing her sweaty palms on her pants before bringing them back up to the girl's cheeks.

"Brea--." She started again, but paused.

The lift was silent.

Too silent.

"Jane?" She called out in a shaky voice, tapping the girl's cold cheek.

Too cold, she realised.

Panic unleashed within her when she got no response at all. Not a cough, not even a gasp.

Max put her shaking finger under the girl's nose and she didn't feel the warm blow of air one usually would.



"No, no, no no." She muttered uselessly, tapping Jane's cheek a little more harshly.

She was such a complete wastoid.

She ducked down, putting her head over the girl's chest and the sound of a heart beating had never made her feel so relieved before.

She didn't realise when her hand cupped the other girl's cheek or when she had unconsciously moulded her finger's with Jane's limp ones, but Max didn't pull away.

She breathed shakily as she heard the comforting thudding of Jane's heart.

The girl was a complete stranger and yet here she was with tears running down her cheeks, fretting-- freaking out over this girl's well-being because Jane had to be okay. She just *had* to be.

The lift jerked a third time then and Max swore as she jumped at the torturous screeching before the light came back on and the doors of the god awful elevator finally opened.

Out stood two men with tags on their coats. The management. The good for nothing management.

"We're very sorry fo--." The lanky one started before glancing at her and then at Jane. Jane who still hadn't woken up.

"Is everything okay, Ma'am?" His eyes darted back to hers.

"Just- just move out of the way," she said hoarsely.

She picked Jane up in her arms, one hand tucked under her knees and the other under her neck before she stood up with a grunt. The girl did not weigh much and even then, Max didn't know how she found the strength to walk all the way to her car in the pouring rain without stumbling.



## 2. ii. in two different ways

### Summary for the Chapter:

"I just.. thought we could go and drink coffee uh together sometime, I guess. Or tea if that's what you like."

### Notes for the Chapter:

I feel like this is a bit of a filler, but there are some things you need to learn as we move along.

I hope you guys enjoy!

p.s: open roads is the hat that Hopper wears, just so it doesn't make sense.

She came to, with her head throbbing, to the sound rain pelting against a window. At first, it felt as though nothing had changed. As if she was still thirteen, sitting beside Hopper, exhausted to the bone from pushing herself so far, farther than she ever had before and watching the raindrops slide down the window as they drove away from the dreadful lab, leaving Hawkins behind, leaving everything behind.

And that misapprehension alone should have brought her back to her senses, but it was the sound of a different, yet familiar voice that roused her from her misconception.

"Thank god you're awake." The relief in the girl's voice was as clear as crystal.

She looked beside her groggily, her head a woozy aching mess. "W-what?"

"I was.. worried about you." Max glanced at her before her eyes darted back towards the road.

Road. Driving.

She felt her bones stiffen.

"Where are we going?" She sat up a little straighter.

"I'm taking you to a hospital." Max answered.

Her breath hitched at that. A flashback of white walls, white everywhere, the sickening smell of surface cleaner went through her and she was hit with a strong urge to vomit as fear sprouted its wings in her lungs.

"No you're not." She didn't know whether she was denying or telling the other girl that.

"Jane, you w-weren't.. breathing." Max reasoned and she didn't know if she imagined the waver in the redhead's voice.

Jane. So many years had passed and she still wasn't used to that name. She wasn't Jane. Jane had died the day she was snatched away before her mother could even hold her in her arms for the first time.

She glanced at the redhead, noticing how her fingers were curled around the steering wheel in a deathly grip, almost white with the force of it and she looked paler than El remembered.

"I'm breathing now." She retorted and Max shook her head at that almost immediately.

"Listen, I'm not a professional, okay? I barely even knew what to do and I think--." The girl started, but she cut in before Max could finish.

Her free will was the one thing she had learnt to treasure, but more than that, protect.

"Either you take me back to the apartments or you stop the car." Her voice took on a lilt of finality without intention.

"Jane, at least see a doctor for th--."

"Stop the car now." She ordered then, her fingers already on the handle ready to walk off the moment it stopped.

She didn't care if she got drenched. She didn't care how her fierce denial over the request made her look. She didn't care if Max thought she was scared of needles. There were certain kind of people she had to stay away from and anyone in a white coat was one of them.

The car did not come to a stop, though.

"I said stop the car now, Max." She said a little more forcibly than before.

"Okay- okay." The girl threw one hand up in surrender. "I'm turning the car around, all right? No hospitals." She finished.

She gave the girl one long stare, trying to gauge her intentions.

They didn't know each other. She was a practical stranger.  
Did Max really care for her well being that much or was she..?

She shrugged the thought off before she could lose herself in it. Ever since she had stepped foot in Hawkins again, she had become more paranoid than she ever had been before, but then it was her paranoia that had kept her safe for this long.

They both sat back in a tense silence afterwards and Jane turned to look out of the window despite how dark it was, not finding the tension in the air uncomfortable unlike the other girl in the car.

"So." Max cleared her throat. "Do you live in the flats?"

She frowned as doubt started brewing with her. Maybe she wasn't being paranoid.

Was Max really who she seemed to be or someone from MK-ULTRA?

Hopper had said the lab had shut down years ago and that hadn't ever put her at much ease. The lab was sealed, but the people were still out there and the lab hadn't even been the real problem, the people had been.

People were ones who were dangerous.

"No." She replied curtly.

"Visiting someone?" Max pried again.

"Why do you ask?" She almost glared at the other girl.

"Sorry, I must sound so nosy right now." The redhead chuckled awkwardly. A habit of hers, she realised.

"I've just never seen you around so, yeah. Just wondering." She finished as the tall apartments' building came in sight.

"Well, here we are." Max announced as she put the car in park. "And the weather's as pleasant as ever." She sighed out, clearing off some of the steam on the windshield with her sleeve.

She would've smiled had Max not been a complete stranger, had she not been so anxious and itching to get away.

"See you around, Max." She glanced at the redhead, ignoring how much something in her wanted to give the other girl a chance.

"I hope you will." Max smiled and it was.. pretty.

She opened the door before worse thoughts could take birth in her mind, giving the stranger one last glance before she walked away into the rain.

People were dangerous.

She was almost halfway to the apartments when she heard Max shout through the the pouring rain.

"Jane! Hold on!"

She turned around to see Max jogging over with a file over her head and raised her eyebrows as waited in silence, wondering what the girl wanted now.

"I.." Max paused. "At least gi- I forgot to ask for your uh.. your number." She stuttered out.

And her heart lurched in her chest at the words.

Had they found her? Could it be possible that only a day had gone by and she was already in the clutches of..?

She clenched her jaw. How good at acting these people were. Posing as social workers, harmless strangers and whatnot. Harmless.

She wished she had Hopper with her then because even at 22 she sometimes still couldn't tell the difference between the wrong and the right.

"Why?" Her voice came out hard, accusing and Max frowned before her eyes widened.

"I'm sorry, I uh meant– crap I'm so awkward." The girl muttered mid sentence. She didn't know if she was supposed to hear the second part.

Her eyebrows shot up further.

"I just.. I haven't really done this before so it's sort of an unknown territory, you know?" The redhead chuckled uneasily.

She didn't.

"I just.. thought we could go and drink coffee uh together sometime, I guess. Or tea if that's what you like." Max rambled and it seemed so convincing.

She didn't answer, still trying to figure out this girl and thinking how Hopper would know. He always knew what to do.

"Or not go at all." Max looked down at her shoes chucking uneasily once more before she cleared her throat. "No pressure." The girl gave her a wobbling smile and it almost made her feel guilty– almost.

She nodded briefly before turning around to enter the building with Max right behind her.

They parted ways when Max went towards the lift and she opted to take the stairs. The lift hadn't been a good idea the first time.

"See you around, Jane." Max called out with a wave and the

elevator's doors closed before she could answer.

With a sigh, she bounded up the stairs and by the time she reached the third floor she was panting.

She paused in the hallway for only a second to catch her breath and put the thoughts of red hair and ocean blue eyes to the back of her mind as she moved.

Someone was waiting for her.

She had only passed two doors before she found the room she was looking for.

13 C.

With a deep breath, she knocked thrice.

The door opened soon enough and she smiled, albeit a shaky one, at the frizzy haired woman.

It had been years. 3 years.

"Oh, Jane, honey! I- we've missed you so much." The other woman gasped out before enveloping her in a warm hug, one that she returned wholeheartedly.

She let a small smile slip past her lips as the woman squeezed her tightly.

"I've missed you too. Both of you." She whispered.

They broke apart a second later.

"Please tell me you're staying the night?" The woman looked at her with hopeful eyes.

She nodded, a smile still etched to her lips.

..

A sigh escaped her as she flopped onto the makeshift bed tiredly and rubbed at her aching temples. Being back to Hawkins was proving to



be like riding an emotional rollercoaster and her head ached with the stress of it all. She had just closed her eyes with the intention of sleeping when her phone rang and she groaned, already knowing who it was.

With a grunt, she stretched her hand to the far left, picking her phone up with difficult maneuver.

She looked at the screen, checking who it was, just in case.

"I see you're keeping your record of always calling at the wrong time." She greeted.

"I see you're keeping your habit of never saying hello." Hopper countered.

"Old habits die hard." She murmured with a smile in her voice.

"I could say the same." He chuckled. There was pause and she heard something rustle before his voice came back on. "So, your old man got the transfer."

She sat up at that. "You mean you're coming?!"

He was her only safe place and she needed him, especially in Hawkins.

"Yup. Former chief of Hawkins is striking back again." He agreed.

"Damn Chief." She started.

"El, don't you dare."

She managed not to laugh. "Back at it again with the open roads." She guffawed.

"You're absolutely absurd." He sighed out, but she could almost see the smile dripping from his voice.

"Must have rubbed off of you." She countered.

"Someone's happy." He noted.

"I am."

"And?" He pried.

"And what?" She mimicked his tone.

"You're never happy without a reason."

"Ah, true," She said, still not answering.

"Are you going to tell me or not?" He sounded almost fed up.

She laughed harder at that. "You're dying to know, aren't you?"

"I wouldn't say 'dying'." He emphasised.

"All right, all right. I'm just.. I'm glad you're going to be here."

"Is that your way of saying you miss me?" His tone was playful with mirth dancing in his words.

Two could play that game.

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"Did you go see..?" He trailed off, knowing she would understand.

"Yeah. I'm spending the night at hers, actually." She laid back onto the her pillow.

"Good. That's good. How is she?"

"The same," She said curtly. They had made it a habit to not discuss details over phone.

"And when are you going to see.. Joyce?"

She paused. She had known the woman briefly. Just around the time when she had helped in finding her son. She barely remembered what the boy had looked like or Joyce for that matter.

"I was thinking I'd go tomorrow, but if you're getting here, maybe we can go together?" She hoped he would agree.

Hop hadn't ever shown romantic interest in anyone except Joyce. She had come to realise that years later and only after that it had started making sense why even after leaving Hawkins he would mention the woman so often.

"After all these years, I... don't know. I don't think she would.. want to see me."

"Fine, then I'm not going either."

"El, no. That's.. You know how she would feel if she found out that you were in town, but didn't go to see her?" He sounded defensive and she smirked.

"Do you know how she would feel if she found out that you were in town, but didn't go to see her?" Her smirk widened.

He sighed defeatedly before speaking. "We'll settle this when I get there. Go to sleep now, it's late."

"Okay, dad. Whatever you say." She chuckled, yawning afterwards. "Goodnight."

"Night, daughter dearest." She knew he was smiling and hung up with one on her face too.

She hadn't called him Dad a lot. Not because he wasn't or did not feel like one, but because Hop somehow felt more.. intimate.

Running into him after escaping the lab had turned out to be the best thing that could've ever happened to someone like her. She doubted she could get any luckier. Dad or Hop, she didn't know. She just knew that he was the one person, the only person who had ever shown her so much kindness at once and given her a place she could call home and she was eternally grateful for both.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Review! And let me know your thoughts.

Also, I hope the difference between El and Jane was visible.

### 3. iii. unlikely visitors

#### Notes for the Chapter:

I don't like this chapter a lot, it's more of a filler, but needed to move the plot forward. Also, I'm so sorry for never updating this, it's been forever!

"Hey Mom! I'm home." Will greeted loudly as he shut the door behind him.

The sound of vacuuming drowned out his mother's instant reply.

"And you're.. cleaning." He added a little apprehensively, looking around the house.

Everything was the same and yet, it looked so different. Their table was clear of the mess of newspapers it usually had spread upon it. The cassette rack actually had cassettes in it and the top of the TV was void of any and there weren't any dirty dishes in the sink while the cooking oven was on.

The vacuum's noise died the next moment and he put his bag down as he walked towards his mom who was dragging the machine away.

"Uh uh, honey. Take that to your room." She pointed to his bag.

It was then he knew something was going on. "Okay, you never clean even when Steve or Mrs. Henderson comes over."

"Will!" She scolded. "Don't you dare say that in front of the guests—" before looking a little defensive as she added— "I clean every once in a while."

"Wait, who's coming over?" His brows rose up in puzzlement.

Who was important enough to make his mother clean and cook at the same time?

The oven dinged then and his mother huffed tiredly at the sound before trotting towards their small open kitchen. "Jim."

His frown deepened further as he followed her into the kitchen.  
"Mom.. why is our plumber coming over for *dinner*?"

She took the chicken out, pausing to look at him with confusion. "The plumber? My goodness, no. I meant Jim. Jim Hopper."

"Hopper as in Jim 'Chief' Hopper?" He asked again just to be sure as he cleared out some space for her to put the tray on.

"Thank you. Yes, Chief Hopper." She sidestepped him. "He called today. Said he's back in town. He wanted to know if it was okay to come over."

"And so you called him over for dinner?" He held in his smile as he opened the cabinet above him to take the plates out.

"Yes, but I hope I won't be regretting that." She shook her head, mild frustration dripping from her voice.

He paused in the midst of taking the crockery out to glance at her.  
"What's wrong?"

"He mentioned a Jane." She bit her lip skeptically as she took the gloves off.

"I don't see the connection?" He murmured unsurely.

"What if it's the woman he's dating?"

Her question had him almost face palming. "Did you not ask?"

"No, I.. I got sca– It would've sounded awkward and now I'm going to look so miserable. He's coming back after seven years–"

"You've been keeping count, haven't you?" He interrupted an unimpressed with a shake of head.

"That's besides the point. I'm still single and he's not." She grumbled with annoyance.

It was odd to see his mother like that, but he vaguely remembered how she had gotten after Hopper had given her the news of his

departure. The man had been like a rock for her to lean on and he knew losing that particular shoulder of support had taken its toll on her.

"Mom."

"Do you think I should call Bob? I think he would be willing to help." She kept on talking, fiddling with her fingers before making a move towards the lounge.

"Mom."

"Actually, you know what? I'm going to go do th—"

"Mom!" He called out loudly, making her pause in her mindless babbling. "Stop doing that, okay? No, don't give me that look—" he commented when she looked at him exasperatedly— "Listen, it doesn't matter if you're single or not, all right? You raised me, *alone*- all these years. You're not *this*." He gestured towards her with both his arms. "You're independent and so so strong, all right?"

She stared up at him silently for almost a whole minute before her eyes started to water. He shook his head as he walked over to her into his arms.

"And if he doesn't see that then, let me say this while I can. Screw Jim Hopper." He murmured into her shoulder.

She chuckled wetly, pulling her head away from where it was resting on his chest. "You've grown so much. I'm so proud of you, baby."

"You're just proud I'm taller than Jonathan now." He grinned as he shook his head.

She chuckled once more as she went back to the chicken and he turned to the open cabinet, finally taking the plates out.

"Oh and can Mike come too?" He asked sweetly.

"Well, there's enough chicken to go around." She smiled, rolling her eyes knowingly afterwards.

...

A whole hour later, Will yawned, turning the TV off before getting up.

"Mom?" He called out. "When did Hop say he would be here?"

"Sometime after nine." She called back.

The doorbell rang then and he bounded past the sofa knowing who it was already. He opened the door, his face instantly breaking into a smile.

"Hi." He grinned.

"Will, who is— oh hey, Mike."

The taller boy looked at him with raised brows before smiling at her.

"Hello, you look very nice, Mrs. Byers."

"At least for today, call me Joyce. I'll feel younger." She shook her head, smiling before turning the corner and disappearing into her room.

"Hi." Mike grinned at him as he leaned down and pecked him chastely. He returned the kiss with just as much affection with a smile etched to his lips even when they pulled away.

"How was your day?" He asked as the taller boy took off his jacket.

"Shitty. I went to see my parents today and Dad.. started again."

"What would he say this time?" He sighed out tiredly.

"The same as before." Mike mumbled. "When are you going to bring around a girl, young Wheeler." The boy mimicked his dad making him chuckle.

"Remember when I was over and you thought he said grill and you were so confused."

Mike guffawed as he threw an arm around his shoulder. "That was

very awkward."

A silence fell over them then and the smile faded from his face. Why couldn't two people love each other without someone having a problem with it? Someone almost always being supposed loved ones. It bothered him more than he let on because the first person to call him a fag had been his own father of all people.

"I'm sorry. With the way your dad treats you, it makes me glad I grew fatherless."

"Hey, not all dads are shitty." Mike shook his head, frowning a little. "I mean, my dad's a jerk, but at least he's not Neil Hargrove. Plus, my day is so much better, now that I'm here." Mike winked before smiling and Will couldn't help but stare.

He scoffed before chuckling. "Out of all of us, only Lucas has had a decent father."

"Yeah, it's weird. Anyway, how was your day?" Mike chuckled before asking.

"Bor—"

The bell rang the next second, interrupting the two of them as his Mom rounded the corner hastily, a sheepish smile on her face. He returned it as he opened the door.

And there stood Hopper along with a pale curly haired girl. He tried to avert his eyes away, but she looked so familiar that he couldn't help himself, but stare, trying to gauge why it felt as though he knew her.

Had he seen her somewhere before?

"Hel—."

"Hop, come on in." His mother cut him off.

The two exchanged hugs and he tried not to look as Hopper whispered something in his mother's ear.



"Jim, you know Will and Mike." His mother introduced, gesturing towards him and then Mike.

"Contrary to what you might think, it feels like they haven't changed at all." Hopper ruffled his hair and patted Mike on the shoulder. "Aside from apparent growth spurts." He added, making his mother chuckle.

An infectious smile formed on his lips at the sight. Hop was a lucky man if he could make his mother smile like that with just a few words.

"Joyce, this is uh Jane. My.. daughter."

"Wh—ow?" He stepped over Mike's foot, silencing him as he himself tried not to react strongly.

"I feel like I've seen her before." Mike muttered into his ear.

He couldn't help, but frown at the black haired boy's words as his mother pulled said girl into a hug. The girl returned the gesture, albeit a little stiffly as though the action was foreign to her.

But only one question swam through his mind even when they had all sat down on the dinner table.

Who was she?

...

"Uh, Joyce—" Hopper started— "would you mind if we took a.. walk?" He asked, giving Jane a brief glance before looking at his mother.

He saw her hesitance before it even crossed her face and piped in. "Mom, I'll take care of the dishes."

She frowned when he slipped out of his chair, taking the plates from her hands and mouthing lowly, "Go."

"I'm sure." He cut in before she could protest.

She cleared her throat awkwardly, giving in and looking at Hopper

who was still waiting for an answer. "Uh, yeah- I mean sure." She nodded with a small smile.

Hopper stood up in return, giving Jane a pat on the shoulder before motioning towards the door.

He watched them go, diverting his gaze towards Mike when his mother closed the house door behind her.

"Well, anyone want to give me a hand?" He rasped out.

Mike stood up at his words silently, walking towards him.

"Hey, do you uh want to join us?" Will asked the curly haired girl, hoping she would say yes because he didn't know how else to make her feel included. She had sat quietly in her seat throughout dinner, listening to all of them make small talk with a polite smile.

In a way, he found himself quite similar to her. He had been there before, behaving the same way on dinner nights with Mr. And Mrs. Wheeler and he would have done the same had the man sitting beside him not been Hopper.

She looked up at him for a moment in silence before nodding slightly and moving out of her chair, pushing it back into place afterwards.

He smiled slightly at her mannerisms before turning towards the kitchen and putting the dishes into the sink, a sigh leaving his lips when the stiffness in his arms lessened.

Mike took ahold of the kitchen towel, slinging it over his shoulder. He chuckled at the sight, staring at the taller boy with a bemused smile. The domesticity of it all felt so overwhelming and something in him couldn't help, but wish it was true; that they weren't in his mother's house where he still lived, but in a house of their own, washing dishes together in the small kitchen of *their* home.

Mike cleared his throat, making him snap out of his thoughts as the boy's brows lifted up. He shook his head with a smile as he turned to the sink.

The sound of shuffling suddenly reminded him of the company they

had over and he paused, looking behind at him at the girl.

"You're awfully quiet." He stated uselessly.

The brunette frowned at that, suddenly making him realise there were better ways and words he could have said.

"I mean, like me." He added, hoping she hadn't taken any offense.

He saw the ghost of a smile that she so obviously tried to hide and felt a little relieved.

The sound of Mike's chuckle made him glance at the boy as he picked up the soap laden foam in his hand.

"That's very much true."

He narrowed his eyes at the boy's words. "Ignore him." He murmured, smiling back at Jane.

She looked between the two of them with amusement before nodding.

"So—" He cleared his throat— "are you from Chicago because that's where Mom told me Hopper moved?"

He heard no answer and glanced behind at the girl.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but Jane—" Mike looked at the girl "I feel like I've seen you before. And so does Will." Mike added the latter part, glancing at him for confirmation.

He nodded at that before speaking. "I mean I wasn't going to bring it up that quickly, but yeah."

She gave the both of them a long gauging stare before sighing audibly.

"Hopper said I can trust you boys. Can I?"

He frowned at the question, feeling curiousness bubble up him before he nodded alongside Mike.

Jane shuffled before slouching against the slabs. "I used to live in Hawkins once."

"What?!" They both spoke up at the same time, glancing at each other with heavy confused frowns.

"That's not possible. Everyone knows everyone here." Will remarked.

"Yeah. It's a small town." Mike agreed.

Jane ran a hand over her face before straightening up. "Well, I used to and it's not something I like to talk about.."

He knew where she was coming from, there were a lot of things he didn't like to or would ever want to talk about and so, it wasn't difficult to his curiousness at rest as he gave Jane a smile before letting Mike's eyes, knowing the boy would understanding.

And that's how almost a half hour later all three of them were sitting on the kitchen floor, munching on some popcorns as they filled Jane in on what she had missed on in all those years of being away.

"Will! Tell her about Humphrey!" Mike almost yelled, looking at him with wide, excited eyes as if to say 'how did we forget that one?'

He barked out a laugh before nodding at the boy. "Okay, so a long time ago, the worst thing that had happened in Hawkins was this owl attacking Eleanor Gillespie because it thought her hair was a nest—" Jane's eyes went wide at that before she burst into a laugh with a hand over her mouth.

"The woman used to live near Mike's so we all saw it happen on our way back from a session of DnD." He laughed when the image flashed back in his mind. The poor woman had flailed around like a headless chicken.

He stopped short when guilt started churning in his stomach and instead, continued retelling. "And guess what, it happened again and Humphrey pulled out an actual rifle on the po—"

"DnD?" Jane mumbled with confusion lacing her voice.

"Dungeons and Dragons. It's this awesome board game we used to

play. Still do, but a lot less often." Mike answered for him with a grin plastered on his lips at the mention of said game.

"Speaking of it! Why don't you come to Mike's apartment next week?" He asked before adding. "We've planned a session after not playing it for months and the rest of the guys are going to come too."

Jane licked her lips apprehensively at the invitation. "The others?"

"Dustin, Lucas and Max. You might've seen them before, well except Max." Mike rambled before scratching at his neck and crossing his legs. "The point is, they're all cool—" He murmured before adding—"but not as much as us." He winked, flashing him a grin.

He noticed her eyebrows scrunch up before smoothening out again as he shook his head at Mike with false annoyance, despite his warm cheeks as he glanced back at Jane. "Like I said, ignore him."

She smiled at the two of them, her eyes crinkling as she did so before replying. "I'll think about it."

He nodded just as the sound of the door opening made their heads turn. Mike stood up as he and Jane followed, seeing Hopper and Joyce turn the corner.

The man raised a brow at them before glancing at Jane. She shook her head silently and he saw, mildly wowed at the conversation that took place without words between the two of them.

"Thank you for the dinner, Mrs. Byers. It was delicious." Jane murmured, speaking to his mother for the first time.

He smiled at the girl, watching as his mother awed before bounding over and giving the brunette a hug. "Please call me Joyce, honey."

And he also noticed the lack of stiffness in Jane when the girl brought her arms around his mother for a second time that day with a small smile playing at her lips.

A few minutes later, he watched Mike climb into the backseat of Hopper's cruiser, waving as the gravel crunched under the tires and the car drove away before turning to his mother with a wide smirk

plastered on his lips. "Well, are you glad Jane isn't his to-be wife?"

She gave him a narrow-eyed stare before raising a finger and whispering strictly. "We are never again bringing that up. Ever."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

A slight glimpse of the Byers household! And Jane gets to know two of the party's members, what do you think the next chapter will bring? Let me know your thoughts!!!!

## 4. iv. just her luck

### Summary for the Chapter:

"We sort of.. met?"

She was only making things worse for herself and somehow she couldn't stop. And a part of her, a very stupid part, couldn't help, but think that *that* was completely natural. That was Max Mayfield in all her insensate glory.

But how was she exactly supposed to put the words—'she fainted and I didn't know how to help so I almost drove her to the hospital, before asking for her number and getting downright turned down—' into a sentence that wouldn't sound as psychotic as it did in her head.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Welp, as always I'm sorry for such a late update, but my finals are just a few days away and I absolutely am not prepared, as always. Anyhow, enough about that. (me in every situation)

Intravenous just Max's luck. Hold on, no, that's four in roman. Cheap Humour™ forever.

I promise Elmax fluff is a few chapters away and so sorry if Max seems out of character and too gloomy, that is just me.

She rolled her eyes as Will murmured something in Mike's ear and the boy smiled in turn, for what must have been the nth time.

"You guys know that I'm here too, right?"

Mike turned to her with scrunched eyebrows as Will cleared his throat, giving her a smile.

It was their unsuccessful attempt to make her feel included before Mike said something under his breath, throwing Will another smile and the boys were lost in each other once again.

She had known that would happen, known why the two had *pleaded* and gotten her out of bed on a *Sunday morning* for her to come along, it had happened before countless amount of times. It was their way of 'we're having Sunday breakfast date, but we need you there to avoid suspicion.'

Half of her heart wished they didn't have to do that, and yet the other half understood the reason, the struggle, the *precautions* they had to take for being in love.

She shook the gloomy thoughts away, not wanting to think about the world, all it's judgmental assumptions and hate so early in the morning and with pursed lips reckoned, she would ask the two lovesick nerds the same favour in return someday. Someday when someone 'compatible' came along.

Neither boy noticed the annoyed sigh that left her lips as she ran a hand over her eyes before chugging all of her latte in one big gulp, her face scrunched up with displeasure when she realised the beverage had gone cold.

As if the chilliness of the morning wasn't enough.

She looked up when the door of the coffee shop dinged, as it did every other five minutes or so. It was hard to ignore the noise, maybe it was the curiosity of who the next person coming in was that always made her look up, but then she had always found observing her surroundings a good way to pass time. There was just so much to see if people really cared enough to look and yet, that one time she wished she hadn't when she spotted a familiar tuft of brown curls.

The effect was immediate, just like it had been the last time she had seen the brunette. Her stomach clenched with something that felt like nervousness, something she was not used to feeling, as she turned left in her seat, discretely drawing the hood of her hoodie over in an embarrassing hope of trying to hide her face from the newcomer until she noticed both Mike and Will with their eyes glued to her, unlike a few moments ago. Their scrutiny in their stares was easier to spot than the sun, or maybe she just knew the two well.



Her eyes met Mike's as the boy raised a brow at her. "What's with you?"

It was a harmless question that, nonetheless, had her clenching her jaw before she tried to act like her usual laid back self. However, it felt like the more she tried to act natural, the more she *couldn't*.

What was she usually like? "What's with me?"

Mike huffed and a part of her had expected him to, as she gave him a blank stare that earned her an eye roll before the curly haired boy shook his head, sipping his drink instead, only to stop short and groan.

It was her turn to give him a curious stare and unlike her, he was mumbling the reason before she could ask. "I'm out of pure fuel."

She cringed at the term, it was, in her not so humble opinion, a horrible mesh of words and impeccably nerdy, but then wasn't that what they were?

"I need a fill too." Will agreed, nodding as he slid out of his seat before nudging towards her Styrofoam cup. "You want some, Max?"

She did, she wanted the let the warmth of the beverage ease away the chilliness in her bones and erase her still groggy mind, but one glance towards the counter for the smallest of second and seeing Jane standing in the queue had her shaking her head.

The sooner they got out of there, the better.

"All right, be right back. No murders." Will smiled at the two of them before drawling past the table.

It had become a joke, after when at some point her and Mike used to be at odds with almost everything, from disagreements over the smallest of things to pissing each other off just for the sake of it.

She chuckled along with the taller boy as Will turned and gave them both a wink.

"No promises." She murmured, just as Mike did.

Her face darted up and met his mirthful eyes before the two of them broke into a loud cackle.

"Well, that wasn't creepy at all." He rasped after catching his breath.

She smirked at him. "I wouldn't hesitate to throw you down a ditch, Wheeler."

"And I won't mind dragging you along, Magazine."

Her nose crinkled up when he said her name the way he did before she scoffed. "Was that even a comeback?"

With an impatient glance at her wrist watch, she leaned back in the chair, catching Mike's sudden bemused smile.

"What?" She sighed, knowing that look all too well, as though he knew something she didn't.

He shook his head, his smile only growing into a full blown grin when he noticed her annoyance. "Something's up with you—" there was a hint of playfulness in his voice that made her roll her eyes and look away as he continued—"definitely something."

"Well, since you know me so well, why don't you tell me what it is?" She snapped, hoping he would let the subject go.

His mouth opened up, most likely to retort with something stupider before Will's rushed footsteps interrupted their playful, harmless bickering.

She didn't even know why she was caught so off guard. It was just her luck, *so much* like her luck for something along the lines of *that* to happen that she shouldn't have been surprised *at all*.

"Mike, look who I ran into!" Will's voice bordered on a shout as he grinned at Mike before turning to her. "Max, this is Jane. She's new—"

"Max?"

She couldn't comprehend much of what all that meant with her brain still trying to understand how on earth Mike and Will even knew

Jane and why the girl wasn't looking at them like they were going to kidnap her or murder her or just something the next minute.

It was the look she had gotten.

"Hey, Max?" Mike's nudge roused her from her muddled thoughts as she blinked up at him questioningly before noticing how Jane's eyes were trained on her and *only* her.

She felt the same nervousness spark up in her again as she cleared her throat before standing up and moving in beside Mike.

"Hi, Jane?" The words came out doubtful enough to make her cringe when Jane's frown only furthered.

"You guys know each other?" Will's brows rose up as his eyes darted between the two of them.

It took her a whole five seconds to comprehend what he meant and that was embarrassing enough to make blood rush up her face. "I—yes? No?" She stumbled over her words, wishing the floor under her would break open just so she could *sleep* off the constantly increasing embarrassment within her.

"Was that a yes or a no?"

She wanted to scream at Mike to stop asking her questions that her brain was momentarily incapable of answering as she shuffled, not knowing what to tell the other boy and ignoring the oh so obvious gauging stare Jane was giving her. "We sort of.. met?"

She was only making things worse for herself and somehow she couldn't stop. A part of her, a very stupid part, couldn't help, but think that *that* was completely natural. That was Max Mayfield in all her insensate glory.

But how was she exactly supposed to put the words— 'she fainted and I didn't know how to help so I almost drove her to the hospital, before asking for her number and getting downright turned down—' into a sentence that wouldn't sound as psychotic as it did in her head.

Good lord, what had she been thinking?

It sounded cringe worthy when put that way and maybe that was exactly what it had been, but could she be blamed when the brunette looked like the way she did and she couldn't control what her brain had done under the influence of Jane.

Yes, that was exactly what it had been.

"She's your friend?"

Her thoughts cut off when she heard Jane voice the question. She darted her downcast gaze up to see the brunette looking at Will for an answer with her brows scrunched up.

"We told you about the party the other day, right?" Will smiled at the brunette as she nodded in turn.

"Well, Max's a part of it too. She can be trusted."

It wasn't that she didn't adore Will for his absolute heartwarming words, but there were instantaneous questions raging in her mind like *trust with what? and who was Jane exactly?* and *how did the two know her?* that she could help, but shuffle under the brunette's gaze when Jane glanced at her.

There were other questions too. She had a lot of them that somehow escaped her mind when Will moved towards one of the chairs and Jane joined them, settling beside her.

*Beside. Her.*

Just her luck.

It was the most she had ever *felt* in the span of fifteen minutes, a jumbled mess of nervousness and fascination and the urge to see, *know* whether Jane had freckles and what was the exact colour of her eyes.

But those fifteen minutes or more, she didn't know, nor cared, but those God dammed fifteen minutes were so difficult because ignoring the small brush of Jane's sweater against her arm whenever the girl sipped at her drink and keeping mind of her eyes that somehow drifted back towards the brunette ever other second was proving to

require quite a lot of effort, more than it should have.

Yet those fifteen minutes were like prologue, a preface of what was to come and that was also when Max realised that she was in *trouble* and it was *bad*.

And just her luck.

•

They left the warmth of the coffee shop sometime later, walking down the pavement instead. She instantly missed the aura, the smell of coffee beans, but most specifically the heaters.

By some odd twist of fate, Mike and Will did not notice just how quiet she had gone.

She, her own self, had *noticed*, but it seemed like the two were also under the influence of Jane, sporting wide grins and a buzzing energy as each word left their mouth about the one time they had all dived off of the cliff.

It was the most rebellious the nerds in them had ever gotten and she was *almost* ashamed, embarrassed because Jane looked like someone who had done *cooler* things and yet, she couldn't help, but notice the constant smile the brunette had had on her face ever since Will's retelling.

The story was boring, but if it made Jane smile, then maybe it wasn't so bad.

"Anyway, the cliff's just one of the few nice places here." Will breathed out, before rubbing his hands together and blowing warmth into them.

"We don't exactly have cool places here in *abundance*-" Mike mumbled with a shrug which had Will chuckling- "and the ones that are decent, are sort of hard to find."

She agreed strongly with the taller boy. A part of her missed her college years in California and some days she even doubted whether choosing friendship over freedom had been the right thing, whether

the promise to come back was worth keeping, but each time she had that thought, she grounded herself with the reasoning that it was only because of her human nature.

The want for what she didn't have. And maybe also her own nature to run away when things tended to go too smooth.

Because smooth sailing meant a storm around the corner and being caught off guard and she would rather be caught in it and fight back.

"Max, you coming?" She looked up to see Will a few steps away, standing by her car.

"Huh?"

"We're showing Jane around. You don't have somewhere to be, do you?"

Just her luck.

She wished she had made up an excuse as a 'no' tumbled past her lips, her hands already fishing the keys out of her pocket.

When she did settle down into the driver's seat, she was grateful for her pesky obsession of clean cars then as she observed Jane settling in the back with Mike following.

Will hit the (music system) as soon as the engine rumbled to life and she had to ignore the urge to turn it off. It annoyed her how much she was fretting over Jane's presence. Jane finding her car dirty, Jane not liking the music she listened to, but just like all the other times that day, she couldn't help it.

And so, with a clenched jaw, she shrugged that thought off, shifting her focus to the road instead as she pulled out of the parking lot.

It was whatever, she had a pretty darn clean car and her taste in music was fabulous.

Wasn't it?

•

Max was almost doubting Will had majored in art and not tourism as she parked the car a few metres away from the cliff.

A sigh slipped past her lips when Mike opened the door as soon as she shut the engine, letting a gust of cold air in as Jane and Will followed.

Mike had opted to sit in the back with the brunette and it was impossible to feel bitter every time the girl smiled or chuckled at something either of the boys said when her mind couldn't muster up a single sentence to throw into their conversation.

Had she always been such an incapable conversationist?

With a begrudge sigh, she stepped out of the car's warmth. Hawkins somehow became even less likeable in winters and she wondered how the cold didn't bother Jane.

She had lived in Hawkins for more than ten years and the cold had never seized to feel painfully numbing even then, but Jane looked like she was breathing for the *first* time.

The brunette looked so much different than the girl she had met in the elevator as she tethered near the edge of the cliff with light footsteps, peering over the edge and chuckling loudly into the air.

She stood back, with her own lips pulled into a smile, observing all the little things about the other girl. Hawkins was a small town and the most uneventful place ever, either that or it was.. a complete mind fuck, like it had been back in 8th grade.

It was so long ago, the days almost felt like a bad dream, if it was possible for the same nightmares to be seen and felt by more than one person.

"It's so beautiful." Her smile widened when Jane breathed the words out, turning her back to the edge of the cliff.

Jane felt like the start of something different and Max had, unknowingly, been waiting for a change for years.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

I hope you liked the chapter! A small sneak peak of Max uselessly falling in love and a Byler date that I am aware is overshadowed by Max's own gayness, but the next chapters will make up for that!

As always, I would love to know your thoughts on this! G'day! or night.

## **Author's Note:**

**Thank you all so much for all your love that keeps me going!! I hope this story won't end up being a complete disappointment!**

*P.S: (Title recently changed).*

*Love from yours truly.*